

Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences  
Akkreditierungsagentur im Bereich Gesundheit und Soziales



# Handbook for Institutional Audit

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## 1. Introduction

The Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences (AHPGS) is an interdisciplinary, multi-professional organization whose mission is to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in higher education in modern European and international contexts. Its work focuses on the fields of health and social sciences, as well as on related fields such as medical care or nursing. By implementing quality assurance procedures, it aims to share, disperse and promote values and good practices.

In an effort to guide and promote institutional autonomy, the AHPGS performs and implements external quality assurance procedures at higher education institutions (HEIs) in Germany and abroad. Peer review and agreement on a common set of guidelines are key to ensuring a qualitative standard in higher education. The goal of external quality assurance procedures is to provide a framework for the joint understanding of these guidelines, as well as to verify compliance with national and international standards. Such procedures may also increase the competitiveness of the HEI. Depending on circumstances, they may also provide resources for an improved management tool at the HEI and accordingly be used as a non-binding precursor to institutional or system accreditation.

In Germany, this is done in the form of **system accreditation**. The main objective is to ensure the internal quality of learning and teaching at the applicant HEI and within its study programs. During this process, the appropriateness and efficiency of the internal quality assurance (QA) mechanism is verified.

While the process of system accreditation is specific to Germany, the AHPGS provides similar services within international reviews, including the implementation of **institutional audits**, by means of which the quality standards of higher education institutions or parts of HEI's (e.g. faculties) can be verified. Institutional audits examine more closely further aspects of the institution, such as planned and current study programs, infrastructure, and organizational and management structure.

The AHPGS is a member of international associations and networks: the "European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (ENQA), the "European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education" (ECA), the "Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education" (CEENQA) and the "International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education" (INQAAHE). The AHPGS is also listed in the "European Quality Assurance Register" (EQAR).

As an organization, the AHPGS is an independent body.

## 2. Plan of external quality assurance procedures

A systematic and transparent outline of the aimed objectives of the HEI is decisive within the external quality assurance procedure itself. HEI members of staff should be aware of and identify with these objectives. They should be willing and able to work towards achieving them and reach a level of excellence. Accordingly, the AHPGS and its experts' peer review is not restricted to evaluating a definite set of standards, but is rather a "strength-weakness analysis" focusing on the distinguishing profile and particularities of the HEI. In the end, the peer review promotes and encourages the HEI's mission and objectives by proposing feasible recommendations.

The external quality assurance procedure generally runs along **three consecutive steps**. These steps are described as follows; however, **depending on the profile and specificity of the higher education institution, they may alter or additional ones may be introduced**.

- I. The HEI submits its application (self-evaluation report and accompanying documents) to the AHPGS, requesting initiation of the external quality assurance process. The application should clearly and explicitly formulate the HEI's planned aims and goals. Additional documentation is also forwarded to the AHPGS to support the application.

The AHPGS reviews the documentation submitted and its compliance with the set aims and goals. If required, additional information can be requested from the HEI in the form of open questions which are forwarded to the University to be answered. At the same time, the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS nominates the expert group. Following the nomination of the expert group, the AHPGS informs the HEI about the expert members. The documentation submitted by the HEI is then forwarded by the AHPGS to the expert group.

- II. The on-site visit of the expert group and the AHPGS takes place at the HEI. During this, the consistency of the documentation submitted is verified. Additional aspects are also reviewed, which the written documentation might not have covered. Following the visit, the expert report is written by the expert group, summing up key aspects and preliminary outcomes of the visit and the documents reviewed. If required, the HEI submits a response to the expert report.
- III. The expert report, the HEI's response, together with the application and all documentation submitted by the HEI are made available to the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS. It is on the basis of these documents that the Accreditation Commission reaches its decision regarding the outcome of the quality assurance procedure. According to the regulations given in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

(ESG, section 2.6), the final report will be published.

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS makes a holistic judgement on the HEI's compliance with the aforementioned criteria as a whole, based on the external review panel's findings, analyses of and conclusions on the HEI's compliance with the relevant criteria. Should the Accreditation Commission not consider the panel's conclusion with regard to a specific criterion, this is explained in the Commission's decision. If a specific criterion is not addressed in the decision it is implied that the Commission largely concurred with the review panel's analysis and conclusion without further comments.

If there are one or several criteria the HEI does not comply with this is considered in the Commission's holistic judgement, which might be positive or negative depending on the amount and significance of the respective areas. However, there are no numerical rules for arriving at a judgement. A conclusion of no compliance for any one criterion does not prevent accreditation per se.

The Accreditation Commission bears in mind the specific legislative, political and socio-economic context of each HEI. Thus, it has to be highlighted, that there are cases where the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS can only give a recommendation about accreditation (with or without conditions) or denial of accreditation, e.g. in Romania. In such cases, the National Ministry takes the final binding decision.

- IV. In order to ensure a standardized follow-up procedure, 24 months after the decision was issued by the Accreditation Commission, AHPGS will ask the Higher Education Institution (HEI) for a written update describing how the proposed recommendations or conditions were taken up by the HEI. This process applies also to countries where the accreditation procedure carried out by AHPGS is not an obligatory part within the national accreditation system.

### **3. Guidelines for external quality assurance procedures**

The AHPGS has developed a set of criteria for illustrating the external quality assurance processes and their aims. They take into consideration the standards formulated in the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The criteria address key points which the AHPGS has identified through its experience in the field. At the same time, they indicate general areas for evaluation when implementing external quality assurance procedures at HEIs. The aims and objectives formulated by the HEI in the application have priority, as do its profile and particularities.

The following criteria should serve as general guidelines for the HEI when completing its application.

Areas for the implementation of external quality assurance at higher education institutions:

- Area A. Profile, objectives and strategy of the institution
- Area B. Quality assurance and quality management system
- Area C. Institutional management and administration
- Area D. Educational activities, including study programs
- Area E. Infrastructure and functional resources

#### **Area A. Profile, objectives and strategy of the institution**

The HEI has a clear profile established and its mission and strategy correspond to its profile. It developed a proportional strategic plan and formulated short, medium, and long-term development plans. It sets future-oriented goals and develops feasible strategies for implementing these.

The objectives formulated by the HEI can be traced back to its overall strategy and development plans, which are internally and externally oriented.

All personnel – teaching and non-teaching – and groups of students are actively involved in the HEI's strategy. They are aware and work towards achieving the goals established by the HEI. External stakeholders also participate in the HEI's strategy.

Institutional autonomy is a key value within the HEI. Academic freedom, diversity, research and teaching, as well as corporate responsibility, are encouraged within the institution.

#### **Area B. Quality assurance and quality management system**

The HEI has developed a quality management system and has clearly-defined objectives. It implements policies and procedures for quality assurance and promotes a quality assurance culture. This follows a quality control loop (PDCA Cycle). Tasks are responsibly divided among the bodies and personnel at the HEI. The quality assurance mechanisms are designed to accomplish the set objectives. Effectiveness is constantly monitored and enhancement is sought. Internal quality assurance includes evaluation mechanisms that are run regularly and cover all areas of activity within the HEI. The evaluation results are documented and made public.

Internal steering processes are identifiable and aim at continuous improvement. The HEI continuously develops plans for improving the quality management system, which is integrated into the HEI's strategic plan. It works at different organizational levels and

involves all the HEI's staff.

### **Area C. Institutional management and administration**

The HEI's organizational structure demonstrates a clear and transparent division of responsibilities, duties and authorities. External stakeholders, students and other relevant parties are involved in the administrative and decision-making processes and the organizational structure responds to the strategy and objectives set by the HEI.

The HEI has regulations to cover the division of tasks and responsibilities, which are unambiguous and transparent. Members of the HEI are aware of their tasks and responsibilities.

Information systems are developed for monitoring and evaluating the effective management of the study programs and all other activities within the HEI.

The qualification and experience of the personnel are adequate to ensure the proper operation of the HEI and that appropriate personnel is employed.

### **Area D. Educational activities, including study programs**

The HEI defines clear goals for each of its study programs, which correspond and relate to the HEI's profile and mission, thus corresponding to the intended qualification level and being comparable on an educational level. Nevertheless, the study programs offered are recognized as unitary due to their particularities.

The HEI develops quality management procedures for the planning of teaching and learning processes and the implementation of study programs. The results achieved are continuously monitored and documented.

The HEI also provides additional educational programs to cover the continuous training of its personnel and the enhancement of student training in the form of workshops, conferences, internal training or further educational programs.

The HEI provides adequate premises for implementing its study programs. The HEI has a library providing adequate learning resources for its study programs. Should the profiles of the study programs require it, the HEI holds additional premises available for practical activities (e.g. laboratories or computer rooms).

Admission requirements and student evaluation methods are clear, manageable and publicly made available.

The HEI has established mechanisms relating to student support and advice.

The HEI promotes exchange programs and international mobility among its students and

teaching personnel.

The HEI promotes research and scientific activity. It has developed a strategy which sets corresponding goals. The study programs encompass research-related components, depending on the profile and final qualification. The HEI has sufficient material, spatial and financial resources to develop its current and planned research activities.

#### **Area E. Infrastructure and functional resources**

The HEI provides evidence that it has sufficient spatial, material and functional resources available to ensure the proper functioning of all teaching, learning, research and administrative activities. They are adequate in relation to the number of students enrolled and the number of teaching and administrative personnel. The HEI develops plans for constantly enhancing its resources.

The HEI has a mechanism for recruiting its personnel. There are corresponding regulations in force for recruiting teaching and administrative personnel, which are clear and transparent and promote equality and recognition based on qualification and experience. The duties and responsibilities of the personnel correspond to their qualifications and experience. The personnel is aware of their tasks and contribute to enhancing the HEI's strategy and activities. The number of personnel employed is adequate for developing all the HEI's current and planned activities.

The HEI secures sufficient revenue and its budget is clearly and transparently planned and covers all costs incurred.

#### 4. Structure of the Self-Evaluation Report

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Name of the applicant/higher education institution:     |  |
| Address:  |  |
| Telephone:  |  |
| E-mail:   |  |
| Contact person(s) for Institutional Audit:              |  |
| Year of foundation of the higher education institution: |  |
| Legal status (public/private/other):                    |  |
| Management board:                                       |  |
| Faculties and departments:                              |  |
| Affiliated institutions (research centres etc):         |  |
| Number of study programs, their profile and type:       |  |
| Number of enrolled students:                            |  |
| Number of full-time teaching and research personnel:    |  |

#### A. Profile, objectives and strategy of the institution

##### A.1. Mission, objectives and standards

Details of:

- The HEI's mission statement, its objectives, and short, medium and long-term strategy.
- The international feasibility and comparability of the mission and strategy within a higher-education context.

- The methods by which the HEI assumes academic freedom and educational responsibility.
  - The methods by which the HEI assumes social responsibility.
- If the case, details of the schools of thought developed by the HEI.

## **A.2. Profile**

Details of:

- The profile the HEI develops.
- The accordence between the HEI's profile and educational and labour market demands.
- The official status of the HEI.
- Its corporate responsibility with reference to its internal processes and the external effects of its actions.

## **A.3. Strategy and policies**

Details of:

- The strategies and policies developed by the HEI.
- The stakeholders involved in implementing the strategy and policies.
- The resources employed by the HEI in implementing its strategy.

## **A.4. Institutional autonomy**

Details of:

- How the HEI secures institutional autonomy and how it implements relevant legal regulations.
- The methods by which the HEI ensures impartiality and independence.
- How external stakeholders and target groups are involved in the process of securing autonomy and how they respond to this.

## **A.5. Cooperation**

A brief overview of national and international cooperation secured in order to achieve the set objectives.

### **Relevant documentation:**

It includes mission statement, brief description, institutional strategic plan, information brochure, development concepts and policies etc.

### **Quality indicators:**

The mission and strategy of the HEI are clear and comprehensive. HEI members of the personnel are aware of them. External stakeholders and potential competitors, too, are aware of the HEI's profile, strategy and mission. Its presence is discernible and classifiable on the higher-education market. Policies are realistically formulated and

correspond to its profile, mission and objectives. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) are identifiable in relation to the strategy of the HEI. Relevant institutional and legal specifications are properly implemented. The HEI develops target- and task-related cooperative partnerships to achieve its objectives.

## **B. Quality assurance and quality management system**

### **B.1. Quality assurance system**

Details of:

- The quality assurance concept and system developed at the HEI.
- The management structures and members of staff involved in the quality assurance system.
- The division of tasks and responsibilities.
- The integration of students in the quality assurance system.
- The manner in which all HEI members of staff become aware and are included in the system.
- The policies and strategies for measuring the effectiveness and results of the QA system.
- The existence of a Management Information System.

### **B.2. Internal and external quality assurance**

Details of:

- The internal and external quality assurance systems.
- How the quality assurance system responds to the HEI's profile, mission and strategy.

### **B.3. Quality assurance monitoring**

Details of:

- The evaluations performed for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning at the HEI.
- The evaluations performed for monitoring additional activities at the HEI.
  - The results of the evaluations.
  - The existence of feedback loops.

#### **Relevant documentation:**

Quality management handbook, evaluation forms, evaluation results, documentation on the strategies implemented and expected results.

#### **Quality indicators:**

The quality management system follows the quality-control loop (PDCA Cycle). This ensures the achievement of targets in teaching, studies, research, development and management. The HEI has an independent, objective structure that monitors the

development and implementation of quality assurance. All the HEI's areas of activity undergo internal and external evaluations. These evaluations are performed on a regular basis and are transparent.

The HEI members of staff are aware of their duties. The quality assurance system is integrative, it takes into account each area of performance and its effects are identifiable.

The quality management system includes the participation of stakeholders and complies with internationally-acknowledged standards and common practices.

## **C. Institutional management and administration**

### **C.1. Organisational structure**

Details of:

- The HEI's organisational structure.
- The division of tasks among the HEI's members of staff.
- The participation of examining boards and program committees in the organisational structure.
- Recruitment and employment procedures.
- How the HEI's structures aid the institution in achieving its mission and objectives.
- The inclusion of students in the HEI's organisational structure.

### **C.2. Academic and teaching freedom**

Details of:

- The structures established for ensuring academic and teaching freedom.
- The methods by which academic and teaching freedom is ensured.

### **C.3. Decision-making processes**

It includes details and description of the decision-making processes within the HEI.

Details of:

- The internal bodies responsible in the decision-making processes.
- How the participation of relevant groups (e.g. students, stakeholders) is ensured in these processes.
- The methods by which funding is secured within the decision-making processes.

### **C.4. Areas of activity**

Details of:

- The bodies which regulate and manage the HEI's areas of activity.

- The division of the areas of activity within the HEI.
- The methods and processes by which these areas are regulated, from teaching to research and management.
- How these areas interconnect at a HEI level and how they interact with stakeholders and external factors.

### **C.5. External mechanisms**

Details of how external management and organisational mechanisms participate in the HEI's structure.

#### **Relevant documentation:**

Legal specifications and documentation regulating the HEI's activities, organisational chart, statutes, basic orders, documentation on the main decision-making processes, regulations for recruiting teaching and academic personnel, vacant positions announcements and descriptions, regulations concerning financial resources, administrative regulations, flow chart for decision-making processes, documentation on committees involved in the administrative and teaching processes, partnership agreements.

#### **Quality indicators:**

The HEI has a homogeneous, clear and unambiguous organisational structure, which results in internal management competencies, responsibilities, and decision-making processes. Funding and resource allocation are regulated in a task-specific manner.

Regulations are formulated in a clear and unambiguous manner. The corresponding documentation is available to all HEI members of staff. Institutional autonomy is ensured by means of both external and internal structures and institutional processes and mechanisms encourage academic freedom.

The areas of activity present strategic targets matching the HEI's vision, mission and profile, and are formally regulated by orders and statutes. All members of the HEI should partake in these activities. The HEI should also ensure stakeholder participation in all areas and at all levels (institution and programs as well as research and development).

### **D. Educational activities, including study programs**

#### **D.1. Study programs, teaching and learning activities**

##### **D.1.1. Intended learning outcomes (ILO), qualification objectives and competencies**

Details of:

- How the study programs the HEI develops respond to the HEI's overall mission and strategy.
- The qualification objectives set by the study programs offered by the HEI.
- How the study programs and their corresponding ILOs form a unitary concept.
- How the HEI's range of courses responds to national and international qualification demands.
- The target groups targeted by the range of courses offered by the HEI.
- The graduate market targeted at and how the qualifications achieved respond to it.

#### **D.1.2. Structure and content of the study programs**

Overview of the content of the study programs and how it responds to the HEI's profile.

Details of:

- The general structure of the study programs offered by the HEI.
- The didactic and teaching methods employed within the curricula and how they respond to the qualification targets.
- The final degrees awarded and their international conformity.
- The inclusion of international credit systems and qualification frameworks (e.g. ECTS, EQF).

#### **D.1.3. Admission regulations**

Details of:

- The admission requirements necessary for enrolment at the HEI; listing of the acts by means of which these are regulated.
- General requirements necessary for access to higher education.

#### **D.1.4. Student assessment methods**

Details of:

- The assessment methods for students.
- How evaluation methods ensure achievement of the qualification objectives.
- The methods by which the transparency and objectivity of the evaluation methods are ensured.

#### **D.1.5. Quality assurance methods for the study programs**

Details of:

- The evaluation and revision methods of the study programs.
- Securing the participation of relevant stakeholders in the programs.
- External evaluations or accreditation procedures the HEI has undergone.

#### **D.1.6. Further programs**

Details of additional educational courses offered by the HEI (e.g. continuous education, professional training).

#### **Relevant documentation:**

Executive summaries of programs at the HEI, overview of the educational courses offered, regulations on the degree program structure (if required, legal regulations), overviews of the curricula, regulations for practical phases (internships) and exchange periods (semesters or academic years), regulations for admission and enrolment (if required, legal regulations), documentation on additional programs, statistics on enrolled students and graduates, cooperation agreements with partner institutions.

#### **Quality indicators:**

The information provided on the HEI's educational offer is clear, succinct and comprehensible. The study programs respond to the HEI's profile and form a consistent unit. They are comparable with the international education market and conform to international qualification frameworks.

The structure and content of the study programs correspond to the education level aimed at. The educational offer is differentiated according to the target group and the degree targeted at. Parallels are identified between the ILO, the final qualifications and the degree awarded. The final qualifications offered are based on a survey of the labour market and respond to its demands.

Implementation of the study programs is assisted by scientific, administrative and research personnel. International systems and qualification frameworks are employed, which enables the participation of foreign students and facilitate international mobility. The examination methods assess students' knowledge, competencies, skills and abilities.

The study programs are reviewed periodically and upgraded to meet national and international developments.

### **D.2. Conditions for teaching and learning**

#### **D.2.1. Infrastructure and Premises**

Details of:

- The management and organisational structures responsible for directing the study programs.
- The spatial and material resources available for the study programs.

- The partner institutions (including internship or labour-market institutions) involved in the study programs.

If required, details of the laboratories, practical rooms, or institutions/ companies from industry, which offer students their equipment for practical exercises.

#### **D.2.2. Library**

Details of:

- How access to study materials and to further research libraries is ensured.
- The library available, as well as cooperative links the HEI has with other libraries.
- The electronic resources and databases available.

#### **D.2.3. Student counselling and assistance**

Details of:

- The internal facilities and structures providing student assistance.
- The methods and strategies employed for student counselling.
- The feedback system developed for identifying potential problems with students.
- Further personal development opportunities for students.
- The assistance provided to students within international mobility and exchange frameworks.
- The financial assistance options (e.g. scholarships, student loans).
- How contact with the alumni is maintained.

#### **Relevant documentation:**

Specifications regarding the teaching and learning premises (if required, details of the premises allocated for study programs), specifications regarding the library, specification of access to external libraries, databases, regulations for tutoring and mentoring programs, specification of the material resources and equipment available for the study programs, specification of the alumni programs.

#### **Quality indicators:**

The premises encourage an adequate qualitative and quantitative study process. An ongoing enhancement of the premises is planned. A library is available – or the HEI holds cooperative links with other institutions to secure the library resources necessary for implementing its educational courses. Depending on the profile of the study programs, the HEI can secure adequate spatial and material resources for practical applications.

The HEI should offer counselling services for international students or for students involved in exchange programs. There should be corresponding centres or committees assigned. The HEI should maintain contact with its graduates and monitor their integration into the labour market.

### **D.3. Research strategy and activity**

Details and description of the main areas in which the HEI develops research activities.

Details of:

- The research strategy and its intended objectives.
- How the research strategy responds to the HEI's mission and profile.
- The correspondence between the study programs and the research activity.
- The involvement of the teaching staff in the research activity, as well as the participation of researchers in the teaching and didactic activities.
- Students' participation in research.
- The personnel, functional and financial resources for research.
- The incentive system developed at the HEI for motivating research staff.
- How the HEI supports junior scientific staff.
- External, internal and inter-departmental partnerships developed within research.
- The system developed for evaluating research results.

#### **Relevant documentation:**

Research strategy and policies, relevant regulations, documentation and reports on research projects, cooperation agreements, budget and funding overview, documentation on the incentive system.

#### **Quality indicators:**

The HEI provides an adequate, productive environment which allows its members to undertake research activities. The HEI sets short, medium and long-term objectives for its research strategy. The research strategy is clearly formulated and involves as many members of the teaching and academic staff as possible. The research activity responds to the HEI's profile and mission. The HEI provides evidence of the adequacy of the research personnel, its facilities and material resources for properly running its research activities.

Research results are continuously monitored and traceable to developments at national and international level.

## **E. Infrastructure and functional resources**

### **E.1. Spatial, material and functional resources**

Details of:

- The spatial and functional resources the HEI has for developing its academic, teaching and research activities.
- The additional resources for supporting students and HEI members of staff (e.g. student dormitories, campus, sports facilities, facilities for extra-curricular activities, for public events or conferences).
- The electronic resources available at the HEI.

### **E.2. Teaching and additional personnel**

Overview of the teaching personnel at the HEI.

Details of:

- The qualifications and experience necessary for occupying a teaching position.
- The academic degrees and the corresponding percentage amongst the HEI's members of staff.
- Recruiting strategies.
- Personal and continuous development opportunities for both teaching and administrative personnel.

Overview of administrative and non-teaching staff.

### **E.3. Financial resources**

Details of:

- The HEI budget and financial resources.
- The strategy developed by the HEI for securing financial resources and allocating them.
- Planned developments and how resources will be secured.

#### **Relevant documentation:**

Ground plan of the HEI, plan for the allocation of spatial resources at the HEI, regulations for the employment of teaching and administrative personnel, financial and business budgets, regulations for allocating financial resources.

#### **Quality indicators:**

The resources available within the HEI support its teaching and learning activities, as well as administrative and management structures and processes. The electronic resources are up to date and accessible and relevant software is available for enhancing the learning process in study programs with a specific profile.

The HEI has clear regulations for recruiting teaching, administrative and academic personnel, which conform to national and international standards. The regulations ensure an adequate level of qualification and experience according to the position available when recruiting personnel.

Adequate personnel is employed to run all activities within the HEI and their qualification and experience is adequate for the tasks they are assigned.

The HEI provides adequate opportunities for the personal and continuous training of its staff, which are available both internally and externally. It monitors the development and results of its staff.

The HEI secures adequate revenue for the proper development of all its activities. The status of the HEI conforms to international and national regulations and does not infringe upon them. The financial resources are adequate for implementing the HEI's strategy, as well as for implementing future plans.